

to see the Father of Waters. Others of his race followed, and De Soto died on its banks in 1542. But these purposeless and accidental visits were of no moment whatever. They did not reach the upper waters, and had no connection with the settlement of the valley. Joliet and Marquette doubtless discovered the Upper Mississippi, and Hennepin, at the instance of La Salle, ascended it to the falls. But no one of these descended it to the sea, or identified it with any of the streams known to fall into the Gulf.

It was La Salle, who in pursuance of a settled purpose and belief, completed the exploration of the Mississippi from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Gulf, solved the problem of the outlet of the mighty stream, which with its tributaries included the whole of the Great West, established communication between the sea and that vast region, and acquired its illimitable territory for France. So far as his predecessors are concerned, the Mississippi valley would have been a wilderness to-day. La Salle came, and with him civilization. He led the vanguard of a never-ending army whose march he directed, whose victories he planned. He passed through the wilderness a solitary figure, yet not alone, for at his back were the myriad hosts of progress; by his side commerce and law and government.